

Daily News (Bowling Green, KY)  
June 2, 2009

## Couple's giving to WKU hits \$1M Lester, Dorothy Reeves put \$259,000 into scholarships for business, ed; university officials praise generosity

NATALIE JORDAN njordan@bgdailynews.com/783-3243,

For Western Kentucky University graduates Lester and Dorothy Reeves, talking about WKU brings up many memories.

"I remember my mother and father taking strolls through campus when I was just able to walk," Dorothy Reeves said. "I had three sisters that went there before me and when I went applying for a job, (then-President Paul Garrett) said how about working for me. That was a thrill. He was such a nice person to work for."

The couple, both born and raised in Bowling Green, have fostered over the years a love for the university, its heritage and legacy, and have given back to the university they feel has given them so much.

The Reeves' recent gift of \$259,000 to the university brought their cumulative giving just above \$1 million, said Tom Hiles, vice president of Institutional Advancement at Western. The couple, now of Panama City, Fla., has given various monetary gifts throughout the past decade, yet their recent gift was by far the largest, he said.

"We feel indebted to Western for helping us along the way and as we became able to give back, we've done that," Lester Reeves said.

The recently given funds will be used for scholarships for the colleges of education and business.

"Tuition has increased substantially over the past seven or eight years, and it's very expensive to go to school," Hiles said.

Hiles said the university is trying to attract students who have the ability to be successful, and without scholarships it would be challenged in recruiting from inside and outside the state.

"We have to have scholarship support to do this," he said. "What it boils down to is we need scholarship assistance to compete for quality students and geographic diversity."

The couple's various gifts, through the College Heights Foundation at WKU, have supported student scholarships, outreach activities for the gerontology program, fellowships in the Educational Doctoral Leadership program and entrepreneurship activities in the Gordon Ford College of Business.

"We're both graduates of Western and we have a longtime connection to Western," Lester Reeves said.

"We're both grateful to them for giving us opportunities."

Dorothy Reeves, who earned her bachelor's degree in 1953 and her master's in 1957, was encouraged by Garrett to take classes toward her bachelor's degree while working as his secretary, taking as many as she could on Saturdays. And what she couldn't take on the weekend, she took during the week, with Garrett allowing her time off to complete her studies.

While Dorothy Reeves worked in Garrett's office, Lester Reeves was on a hunt for a job. The 1947 graduate was unemployed for a while, when Garrett sent word through Dorothy Reeves to see if he would be interested in opening a store on campus.

"My father was into grocery stores, and (Garrett) thought I'd be interested, and I was only interested because I was unemployed at the time and the only source of income was Dorothy's check," he said.

Lester Reeves operated the Village Market on WKU's campus. Wanting a larger store – and more opportunities – he sold the Village Market to two WKU students, and opened the first of seven Reeves Food Stores – four in Bowling Green and three in other parts of Kentucky – in 1954. While operating the Reeves Food Centers, Lester founded the Jr. Food Stores chain that operated about 60 convenience stores in Kentucky and northern Tennessee.

"In 1969, there was a niche for convenient stores," he said. "I opened the first Jr. Food Store in January 1969 in the 1400 block of Adams Street, and that chain grew."

The stores were purchased by Houchens Industries in 1998, which still operates the convenient stores.



After receiving her bachelor's degree, Dorothy Reeves started a teaching career, first with the Warren County school system. After receiving her master's, she became a guidance counselor. She received a doctorate from Peabody College, now a part of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, and went to teach at WKU in the Department of Educational Leadership. She taught there until she retired around 1987.

Lester Reeves is now chairman of Reeves Enterprises Inc., a commercial real estate company.

"Anybody who has been successful has been helped along the way by a lot of people, not only family but others," he said. "WKU has done that for us, and I would suggest to graduates of WKU and others in the community to do the same because the university is an important contributor to the economy and educational programs in the area."

"The gift reflects the spirit of WKU," Hiles said. "They truly understand the history and legacy of WKU."